

Washington, DC —Congressman Joe Sestak (D-PA) released a statement following attending today's House Armed Services Committee Hearing with Major General David Petraeus, the top US commander in Iraq, and US Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker. — "General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker gave good presentations today, with General Petraeus particularly focusing on military security, such as indicating a decrease in violent incidents, while Ambassador Crocker indicated that Iraqi leaders have not moved towards national reconciliation.

However, their presentations in no way provided for the comprehensive discussion and debate that needs to occur in our nation about Iraq. What General Petraeus failed to address is the impact of Iraq on US military security globally, which having the Joint Chiefs of Staff to present this view would have been helpful. There is currently no army unit to deploy anywhere around the world because the military readiness is so lacking due to the overextension of our troops.

This presentation also lacked a senior State Department official to discuss the impact of Iraq on the political progress of the region and globally that would make America safer. In short, this debate should have been more about measuring American security interests and progress, and not just the Iraqis.

As an example, when General Petraeus was asked about whether the impact of Iraq in the global war on terror would be better by troops in Iraq being used elsewhere, he responded that someone else should be asked about that question. A comprehensive presentation would have not only included General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker, but also key individuals involved in our nation's security, such as the Joint Chiefs of Staff and senior State Department officials.

Equally disconcerting was the use of "violence counts," not dissimilar to "body counts" in Vietnam. For example, General Petraeus said 2,500 terrorists have been killed, but when asked whether the number of new terrorists have increased, he responded that the number depended on the intelligence agency he spoke with and it numbered in the thousands. Until we know and can compare trends with "static" violence counts, we would be unable to adequately discern the progress of our military.

Finally, it was also disconcerting to hear that Ambassador Crocker dismissed the role of Iran in bringing political stability to Iraq. I believe that the way out of Iraq is through diplomacy with Tehran.

I have always believed in a planned end to our military engagement in Iraq, and that such a "date certain" deadline will force Iraqi leaders to assume responsibility, while providing Iran and Syria the incentive to prevent violence otherwise caused by our departure. Our troops could either return home or deploy to regions where terrorists pose a threat to our security, while others remain in our already-existing bases in Kuwait, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and aircraft carrier and amphibious groups to ensure our interests in the region.

As Yogi Berra said, "When you come to a fork in a road, take it." We must as a nation decide

whether stay on the road of stalemate, or reach across the aisle to bring bi-partisan support for a resolution to the War in Iraq. Because our Army must either start a lengthy redeployment or risk unraveling, we have the catalysts for a bi-partisan agreement to end this war with a stable Iraq, if we also work with Iran and Syria to meet this goal. And although I believe a "date certain" is the best strategy, this opportunity for a bi-partisan Congressional agreement/approach—to convince the President to use diplomacy to bring about a stable accommodation in Iraq once our troops redeploy—will undoubtedly require an initial redeployment deadline that is a "goal" instead of a "date certain." Despite my consistent (and continuing) belief that a "date certain" is the best leverage to change Iraqis' and regional nations' behavior, when faced with the otherwise assured negative consequences for our nation of a partisan stalemate on resolving the tragic misadventure in Iraq, this compromise is needed for America's security."

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.